

Will Co-Chair New National Lab Caucus to Highlight Importance of Labs to National Competitiveness

Wednesday, December 12, 2012

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Ben Ray Luján of New Mexico's Third District sent a letter to Congressional leaders today urging them to resolve the fiscal cliff in a manner that prevents damaging funding cuts to the national laboratories, including Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories.

In the letter, Luján highlights the important role these labs have played in providing cutting-edge research and innovation for applications ranging from national security to the Mars rover and renewable energy. He expresses his concerns that deep budget cuts due to sequestration will threaten the vitality of the labs and their capability to fulfill their scientific and security missions.

In addition, Luján announced that he has joined the new House Science and National Labs Caucus as a co-chair, partnering with Reps. Randy Hultgren (R-IL), Chaka Fattah (D-PA), and Alan Nunnelle (R-MS), who will also co-chair the bipartisan group. The goal of the caucus is to raise awareness about the importance of the national labs to the long-term economic vitality and security of the nation, as well as to increase support for federal funding of the labs.

"The national labs contribute to our economy in so many ways. The work that occurs at the labs as well as the local businesses its innovations support is a critical source of jobs in New Mexico and in communities across the country," Luján said. "By bringing members of Congress together who understand the vital contributions the labs make, we can enhance the awareness of the labs' work and amplify our advocacy efforts."

Below is the text of Luján's letter to Congressional leaders.

December 12, 2012

Honorable John Boehner
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
Capitol Building, H-232
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
United States House of Representatives
Capitol Building, H-204
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Boehner and Leader Pelosi,

I am writing to urge you to work to resolve our nation's fiscal situation in a manner that averts the potentially catastrophic effects of pending sequestration cuts to the scientific, research, and national security capabilities of New Mexico's two national laboratories.

The State of New Mexico has a rich tradition of supporting many of our federal government's most important efforts. Sandia and Los Alamos National Laboratories have provided cutting-edge research and innovation to strengthen our economic competitiveness, enhance our national security and advance humanity's scientific knowledge. In addition to their well-known role in the stewardship of the nuclear stockpile and promotion of nonproliferation, these national laboratories have advanced science and engineering and served the nation in a number of areas. As Curiosity explores Mars, it utilizes sensors, cameras, and lasers developed at Los Alamos to gain a deeper understanding of the planet's surface. After an earthquake and tsunami devastated the Fukushima Reactor, a team from the lab used cosmic-ray radiography to gather images of nuclear materials within the damaged reactors. When cartels dig tunnels to surreptitiously enter the country, the U.S. Border Patrol calls the scientists at Sandia National Laboratory to use seismic wave technologies to help locate them. These labs are continuing to advance many of our most vital scientific endeavors, developing new innovations ranging from an HIV vaccine to an energy storage battery that increases the competitiveness of renewable energy sources.

Maintaining the vitality of these laboratories is crucial to our nation's security and economic competitiveness, but large and arbitrary sequestration cuts threaten to do permanent harm to these resources. The extent of the budget cuts imposed by the sequester would decimate many of the facility's capabilities and prevent them from fulfilling the scientific and security missions charged to them by Congress. Ultimately, these short-sighted sequestration cuts would result in a diminished scientific research base, stalled technological innovation, and a

more vulnerable nation. Moreover, the cost to the nation to reconstitute these capabilities at a future time would be much larger and would likely negate any short-term savings from initial budget cuts.

Because the risks to national security are so high and the damage to our long-term innovation and economic development would be so severe, I urge a solution to sequestration be found that supports the national laboratories of America so that they continue to serve as an engine for our competitiveness far into the future.

Sincerely,
Ben Ray Luján
Member of Congress

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